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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

Attorney Docket No.

24976.8002.1003

First Inventor or Application Identifier

Peri Hartman

Title

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PLACING A PURCHASE ORDER
VIA A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

Express Mail Label No.

EL372729097US

Only for nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR § 1.53(b)

APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

ADDRESS TO:

Box Patent Application
Assistant Commissioner for Patent
Washington, D.C. 202311. ☐ General Authorization Form & Fee Transmittal
(Submit an original and a duplicate for fee processing)2. ☒ Specification [Total Pages] 25
(preferred arrangement set forth below)

- Descriptive Title of the Invention
- Cross References to Related Applications
- Statement Regarding Fed sponsored R & D
- Reference to Microfiche Appendix
- Background of the Invention
- Brief Summary of the Invention
- Brief Description of the Drawings (if filed)
- Detailed Description
- Claim(s)
- Abstract of the Disclosure

3. ☐ Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) [Total Sheets] 12

4. Oath or Declaration [Total Pages] 2

- a. ☐ Newly executed (original or copy)
- b. ☒ Copy from a prior application (37 CFR 1.63(d))
(for continuation/divisional with Box 16 completed)
- i. ☐ DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)
Signed statement attached deleting
inventor(s) named in the prior application,
see 37 CFR 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b)

*NOTE FOR ITEMS 1 & 13: IN ORDER TO BE ENTITLED TO
PAY SMALL ENTITY FEES, A SMALL ENTITY STATEMENT IS
REQUIRED (37 C.F.R. § 1.27), EXCEPT IF ONE FILED IN A
PRIOR APPLICATION IS RELIED UPON (37 C.F.R. § 1.28).

5. ☐ Microfiche Computer Program (Appendix)6. Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission
(if applicable, all necessary)

- a. ☐ Computer-Readable Copy
- b. ☐ Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
- c. ☐ Statement verifying identity of above copies

ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

7. ☐ Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))8. ☐ 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement ☐ Power of Attorney
(when there is an assignee)9. ☐ English Translation Document (if applicable)10. ☒ Information Disclosure ☐ Copies of IDS
Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 Citations11. ☒ Preliminary Amendment12. ☒ Return Receipt Postcard12. ☐ Small Entity ☐ Statement filed in prior application,
Statement(s) Status still proper and desired14. ☐ Certified Copy of Priority Document(s)
(if foreign priority is claimed)15. ☐ Other: _____

16. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, check appropriate box and supply the requisite information below and in a preliminary amendment

☒ Continuation ☐ Divisional ☐ Continuation-In-Part (CIP) of prior Application No.: 08/928,951

Prior application information: Examiner Demetra R. Smith

Group / Art Unit 2764

For CONTINUATION or DIVISIONAL apps only: The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which an oath or declaration is supplied
under Box 4b, is considered a part of the disclosure of the accompanying continuation or divisional application and is hereby incorporated by
reference. The incorporation can only be relied upon when a portion has been inadvertently omitted from the submitted application parts.

☐ Claims the benefit of Provisional Application No. _____

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May 25, 1999

PATENT

I hereby certify that on the date specified below, this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as Express Mail addressed to the Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC 20231.

May 25, 1999
Date

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Present Application

Applicants : Peri Hartman et al.
Filed : May 25, 1999
For : METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PLACING A PURCHASE ORDER
VIA A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK
Docket No. : 24976.8002.1003

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Filed : September 12, 1997
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Art Unit : 2764
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Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, DC 20231

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Sir:

Please amend the above-identified application as follows:

In the Specification:

--CROSS-REFERENCE TO PRIOR APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. Patent Application No. 08/928,951, filed September 12, 1997, and allowed March 29, 1999, which is hereby incorporated by reference.--

In the Claims:

Please cancel claims 21-48.

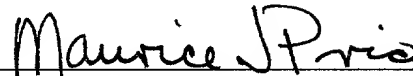
REMARKS

Applicants respectfully request consideration of this application and its early allowance.

Respectfully submitted,

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PLACING A PURCHASE ORDER VIA A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

TECHNICAL FIELD

5 The present invention relates to a computer method and system for placing an order and, more particularly, to a method and system for ordering items over the Internet.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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10 The Internet comprises a vast number of computers and computer networks that are interconnected through communication links. The interconnected computers exchange information using various services, such as electronic mail, Gopher, and the World Wide Web ("WWW"). The WWW service allows a server computer system (*i.e.*, Web server or Web site) to send graphical Web pages of information to a remote client computer system. The

15 remote client computer system can then display the Web pages. Each resource (*e.g.*, computer or Web page) of the WWW is uniquely identifiable by a Uniform Resource Locator ("URL"). To view a specific Web page, a client computer system specifies the URL for that Web page in a request (*e.g.*, a HyperText Transfer Protocol ("HTTP") request). The request is forwarded to the Web

20 server that supports that Web page. When that Web server receives the request, it sends that Web page to the client computer system. When the client computer system receives that Web page, it typically displays the Web page using a browser. A browser is a special-purpose application program that effects the requesting of Web pages and the displaying of Web pages.

25 Currently, Web pages are typically defined using HyperText Markup Language ("HTML"). HTML provides a standard set of tags that define how a Web page is to be displayed. When a user indicates to the browser to display a Web page, the browser sends a request to the server computer system to transfer to the client computer system an HTML document that defines the Web

page. When the requested HTML document is received by the client computer system, the browser displays the Web page as defined by the HTML document. The HTML document contains various tags that control the displaying of text, graphics, controls, and other features. The HTML document may contain URLs
5 of other Web pages available on that server computer system or other server computer systems.

The World Wide Web is especially conducive to conducting electronic commerce. Many Web servers have been developed through which vendors can advertise and sell product. The products can include items (*e.g.*,
10 music) that are delivered electronically to the purchaser over the Internet and items (*e.g.*, books) that are delivered through conventional distribution channels (*e.g.*, a common carrier). A server computer system may provide an electronic version of a catalog that lists the items that are available. A user, who is a potential purchaser, may browse through the catalog using a browser and select
15 various items that are to be purchased. When the user has completed selecting the items to be purchased, the server computer system then prompts the user for information to complete the ordering of the items. This purchaser-specific order information may include the purchaser's name, the purchaser's credit card number, and a shipping address for the order. The server computer system then
20 typically confirms the order by sending a confirming Web page to the client computer system and schedules shipment of the items.

Since the purchaser-specific order information contains sensitive information (*e.g.*, a credit card number), both vendors and purchasers want to ensure the security of such information. Security is a concern because
25 information transmitted over the Internet may pass through various intermediate computer systems on its way to its final destination. The information could be intercepted by an unscrupulous person at an intermediate system. To help ensure the security of the sensitive information, various encryption techniques are used when transmitting such information between a client computer system and a
30 server computer system. Even though such encrypted information can be

intercepted, because the information is encrypted, it is generally useless to the interceptor. Nevertheless, there is always a possibility that such sensitive information may be successfully decrypted by the interceptor. Therefore, it would be desirable to minimize the sensitive information transmitted when
5 placing an order.

The selection of the various items from the electronic catalogs is generally based on the "shopping cart" model. When the purchaser selects an item from the electronic catalog, the server computer system metaphorically adds that item to a shopping cart. When the purchaser is done selecting items, then all
10 the items in the shopping cart are "checked out" (*i.e.*, ordered) when the purchaser provides billing and shipment information. In some models, when a purchaser selects any one item, then that item is "checked out" by automatically prompting the user for the billing and shipment information. Although the shopping cart model is very flexible and intuitive, it has a downside in that it
15 requires many interactions by the purchaser. For example, the purchaser selects the various items from the electronic catalog, and then indicates that the selection is complete. The purchaser is then presented with an order Web page that prompts the purchaser for the purchaser-specific order information to complete the order. That Web page may be prefilled with information that was provided
20 by the purchaser when placing another order. The information is then validated by the server computer system, and the order is completed. Such an ordering model can be problematic for a couple of reasons. If a purchaser is ordering only one item, then the overhead of confirming the various steps of the ordering process and waiting for, viewing, and updating the purchaser-specific order
25 information can be much more than the overhead of selecting the item itself. This overhead makes the purchase of a single item cumbersome. Also, with such an ordering model, each time an order is placed sensitive information is transmitted over the Internet. Each time the sensitive information is transmitted over the Internet, it is susceptible to being intercepted and decrypted.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An embodiment of the present invention provides a method and system for ordering an item from a client system. The client system is provided with an identifier that identifies a customer. The client system displays
5 information that identifies the item and displays an indication of an action (e.g., a single action such as clicking a mouse button) that a purchaser is to perform to order the identified item. In response to the indicated action being performed, the client system sends to a server system the provided identifier and a request to order the identified item. The server system uses the identifier to identify
10 additional information needed to generate an order for the item and then generates the order.

The server system receives and stores the additional information for customers using various computer systems so that the server system can generate such orders. The server system stores the received additional
15 information in association with an identifier of the customer and provides the identifier to the client system. When requested by the client system, the server system provides information describing the item to the requesting client system. When the server system receives a request from a client system, the server system combines the additional information stored in association with the
20 identifier included in the request to effect the ordering of the item.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figures 1A-1C illustrate single-action ordering in one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a block diagram illustrating an embodiment of the
25 present invention.

Figure 3 is a flow diagram of a routine that enables single-action ordering for a customer.

Figure 4 is a flow diagram of a routine to generate a Web page in which single-action ordering is enabled.

Figure 5 is a flow diagram of a routine which processes a single-action order.

Figure 6 is a flow diagram of a routine for generating a single-action order summary Web page.

5 Figure 7 is a flow diagram of a routine that implements an expedited order selection algorithm.

Figures 8A-8C illustrate a hierarchical data entry mechanism in one embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention provides a method and system for single-action ordering of items in a client/server environment. The single-action ordering system of the present invention reduces the number of purchaser interactions needed to place an order and reduces the amount of sensitive information that is transmitted between a client system and a server system. In
15 one embodiment, the server system assigns a unique client identifier to each client system. The server system also stores purchaser-specific order information for various potential purchasers. The purchaser-specific order information may have been collected from a previous order placed by the purchaser. The server system maps each client identifier to a purchaser that may use that client system
20 to place an order. The server system may map the client identifiers to the purchaser who last placed an order using that client system. When a purchaser wants to place an order, the purchaser uses a client system to send the request for information describing the item to be ordered along with its client identifier. The server system determines whether the client identifier for that client system is
25 mapped to a purchaser. If so mapped, the server system determines whether single-action ordering is enabled for that purchaser at that client system. If enabled, the server system sends the requested information (e.g., via a Web page) to the client computer system along with an indication of the single action to perform to place the order for the item. When single-action ordering is enabled,

the purchaser need only perform a single action (*e.g.*, click a mouse button) to order the item. When the purchaser performs that single action, the client system notifies the server system. The server system then completes the order by adding the purchaser-specific order information for the purchaser that is mapped to that client identifier to the item order information (*e.g.*, product identifier and quantity). Thus, once the description of an item is displayed, the purchaser need only take a single action to place the order to purchase that item. Also, since the client identifier identifies purchaser-specific order information already stored at the server system, there is no need for such sensitive information to be transmitted via the Internet or other communications medium.

Figures 1A-1C illustrate single-action ordering in one embodiment of the present invention. Figure 1A illustrates the display of a Web page describing an item that may be ordered. This example Web page was sent from the server system to the client system when the purchaser requested to review detailed information about the item. This example Web page contains a summary description section 101, a shopping cart section 102, a single-action ordering section 103, and a detailed description section 104. One skilled in the art would appreciate that these various sections can be omitted or rearranged or adapted in various ways. In general, the purchaser need only be aware of the item or items to be ordered by the single action and of the single action needed to place the order. The summary description and the detailed description sections provide information that identifies and describes the item(s) that may be ordered. The shopping cart section provides the conventional capability to add the described item to a shopping cart. The server system adds the summary description, the detailed description, and the shopping cart sections to each Web page for an item that may be ordered. The server system, however, only adds the single-action ordering section when single-action ordering is enabled for that purchaser at that client system. (One skilled in the art would appreciate that a single Web page on the server system may contain all these sections but the single-action ordering section can be selectively included or excluded before

sending the Web page to the client system.) This example single-action ordering section allows the purchaser to specify with a single click of a mouse button to order the described item. Once the purchaser clicks the mouse button, the item is ordered, unless the purchaser then takes some action to modify the order. The

5 single-action ordering section contains a single-action ordering button 103a, purchaser identification subsection 103b, and single-action ordering information subsections 103c and 103d. The purchaser information subsection displays enough information so that the purchaser can verify that the server system correctly recognizes the purchaser. To reduce the chances of sensitive

10 information being intercepted, the server system sends only enough information so that the purchaser is confident that the server system correctly identified the purchaser but yet not enough information to be useful to an unscrupulous interceptor. The additional information subsections allow the purchaser to obtain various settings or obtain more information related to the single-action ordering.

15 If the purchaser wants to verify the shipping address, the purchaser can select the "check shipping address" label. In response to this selection, the server system may require the purchaser to perform a "login" so that the identity of the purchaser can be verified before the shipping information is viewed or modified. The server system then sends a Web page to the client system for display and

20 possible modification of the shipping address. In this way, the transmitting of the sensitive shipping address can be avoided unless requested by the verified purchaser.

When the purchaser selects the single-action ordering button, the client system sends a message to the server system requesting that the displayed

25 item be ordered. After the server system processes the message, the server system provides to the client system a new Web page that confirms receipt of the single-action order. Figure 1B illustrates the display of a Web page confirming a single-action order. The confirming Web page contains essentially the same information as the Web page describing the item (*i.e.*, Figure 1A) except that an

30 order confirmation section 105 is displayed at the top of the Web page. The

order confirmation section confirms that the order has been placed and provides an opportunity for the purchaser to review and change the single-action order. Alternatively, the confirming Web page can be identical to the Web page describing the item (*i.e.*, Figure 1A), except that the single-action ordering button is replaced with a message confirming the order.

If a single-action ordering is not currently enabled for the client system but could be enabled, then the server system can generate a Web page like Figure 1A, except that the single-action ordering button 103a is replaced by a single-action ordering enable button. Such a replacement button could contain text instructing the purchaser to click on the button to enable single-action ordering. When the purchaser clicks on that button, the server system would send the Web page of Figure 1A to be displayed. Single-action ordering can be enabled whenever the server system has stored sufficient purchaser-specific order information for that client system to complete a single-action order. If the server system does not have sufficient information, then when the purchaser selects the single-action ordering button, the server system can provide a Web page to collect the additional information that is needed. The server system may require the purchases to "login" so that the identify of the purchaser can be verified before the single-action ordering is enabled.

To help minimize shipping costs and purchaser confusion, the server system may combine various single-action orders into a multiple-item order. For example, if a purchaser orders one item using the single-action ordering and five minutes later orders another item using the single-action ordering, then those orders may be cost effectively combined into a single order for shipping. The server system combines the single-action orders when their expected ship dates are similar. For example, if one item is immediately available and the other item will be available in one day, then the two single-action orders may be cost-effectively combined. However, if the other item will not be available for two weeks, then the two single-item orders would not be combined. Figure 1C illustrates the display of a Web page representing four

single-action orders that have been combined into two separate multiple-item orders based on the availability of the items. The order information 106 indicates that item 1 and item 2, which will be available in three or fewer days, have been combined into one order. The order information 107 indicates that items 3 and 4, which will not be available within one week, are combined into a separate order. In one embodiment, the server system may combine single-action orders that are placed within a certain time period (e.g., 90 minutes). Also, the server system may combine or divide orders when the orders are scheduled for shipment based on the then current availability of the items ordered. This delayed modification of the orders is referred to as "expedited order selection" and is described below in detail.

Figure 2 is a block diagram illustrating an embodiment of the present invention. This embodiment supports the single-action ordering over the Internet using the World Wide Web. The server system 210 includes a server engine 211, a client identifier/customer table 212, various Web pages 213, a customer database 214, an order database 215, and an inventory database 216. The server engine receives HTTP requests to access Web pages identified by URLs and provides the Web pages to the various client systems. Such an HTTP request may indicate that the purchaser has performed the single action to effect single-action ordering. The customer database contains customer information for various purchasers or potential purchasers. The customer information includes purchaser-specific order information such as the name of the customer, billing information, and shipping information. The order database 215 contains an entry for each order that has not yet been shipped to a purchaser. The inventory database 216 contains a description of the various items that may be ordered. The client identifier/customer table 212 contains a mapping from each client identifier, which is a globally unique identifier that uniquely identifies a client system, to the customer last associated with that client system. The client system 220 contains a browser and its assigned client identifier. The client identifier is stored in a file, referred to as a "cookie." In one embodiment, the server system

assigns and sends the client identifier to the client system once when the client system first interacts with the server system. From then on, the client system includes its client identifier with all messages sent to the server system so that the server system can identify the source of the message. The server and client systems interact by exchanging information via communications link 230, which may include transmission over the Internet.

One skilled in the art would appreciate that the single-action ordering techniques can be used in various environments other than the Internet. For example, single-action ordering can also be in an electronic mail environment in which an item is described in an electronic mail message along with an indication of the single action that is to be performed to effect the ordering of the item. Also, various communication channels may be used such as local area network, wide area network, or point-to-point dial up connection. Also, a server system may comprise any combination of hardware or software that can generate orders in response to the single action being performed. A client system may comprise any combination of hardware or software that can interact with the server system. These systems may include television-based systems or various other consumer products through which orders may be placed.

Figure 3 is a flow diagram of a routine that enables single-action ordering for a customer. To enable single-action ordering, a server system needs to have information about the customer that is equivalent to the purchaser-specific order information. The server system can obtain this information in various ways. First, the server system could ask the customer if they would like to have single-action ordering enabled. If so, then the server system could prompt the customer using a Web page for the purchaser-specific order information. Second, the server system could also save the purchaser-specific order information collected when an order is placed conventionally. The server system could, either automatically or with the customer's assent, enable single-action ordering. In step 301, the server system retrieves the client identifier that was sent by the client system. In step 302, the server system updates the client

identifier/customer table to indicate that the generated client identifier has been associated with that customer. In step 303, the server system sets a flag indicating that single-action ordering is enabled for that client identifier and that customer combination. That flag may be stored in the client identifier/customer table. In step 304, the server system supplies a confirming Web page to the client system. The next time a purchaser attempts to order an item, the client system will supply its client identifier to the server system. If single-action ordering is enabled for that purchaser, the server system will assume that the purchaser is the customer associated with that client identifier in the client identifier/customer table. Thus, a purchaser may not want to allow the server system to enable single-action ordering if there is a possibility that someone else may use that same client system.

Figure 4 is a flow diagram of a routine to generate a Web page in which single-action ordering is enabled. When single-action ordering is enabled, the server system generates a Web page describing an item as is conventionally done and then adds a single-action ordering section. In one embodiment, the server system adds partial purchaser-specific order information to the section. This information may include the customer's name, a shipping address moniker selected by the purchaser (e.g., "at home"), and the last five digits of a credit card number or a nickname selected by the purchaser. Such partial information should be the minimum information sufficient to indicate to the purchaser whether or not the server system is using the correct purchaser-specific order information. In step 401, the server system generates a standard shopping cart-type Web page for the item. In step 402, if the single-action ordering flag has been set for the client identifier and customer combination, then the server system continues at step 403, else the server system completes. In step 403, the server system adds the single-action section to the Web page and completes.

Figure 5 is a flow diagram of a routine which processes a single-action order. When a purchaser performs the single action needed to place an order, the client system notifies the server system. The server system then

combines the purchaser-specific order information for the customer associated with the client system with the item order information to complete the order. The single-action order may also be combined with other single-action orders and possibly with other conventionally placed orders to reduce shipping costs. In one embodiment, single-action orders can be combined if they are placed within a certain time period of each other (e.g., 90 minutes). This routine illustrates the combining of the single-action orders into a short-term order (e.g., available to be shipped in less than a week) and a long-term order (e.g., available to be shipped in more than a week). One skilled in the art would appreciate that the single-action orders can be combined in various ways based on other factors, such as size of shipment and intermediate-term availability. In step 501, if the item is expected to be shipped in the short term, then the server system continues at step 502, else the server system continues at step 505. In step 502, if a short-term order has already been opened for the purchaser, then the server system continues at step 504, else the server system continues at step 503. In step 503, the server system creates a short-term order for the purchaser. In step 504, the server system adds the item to the short-term order and continues at step 508. In step 505, if a long-term order has already been opened for the purchaser, then the server system continues at step 507, else the server system continues at step 506. In step 506, the server system creates a long-term order for the purchaser. In step 507, the server system adds the item to the long-term order. In step 508, the server system generates and sends the confirmation and completes.

Figure 6 is a flow diagram of a routine for generating a single-action order summary Web page. This Web page (e.g., Figure 1C) gives the user the opportunity to view and modify the short-term and long-term single-action orders. In step 601, the server system adds the standard single-action order information to the Web page. In step 602, if a short-term order is open, then the server system adds the short-term order to the Web page in step 603. In step 604, if a long-term order is open, then the server system adds the long-term order information to the Web page in step 605 and completes.

Figure 7 is a flow diagram of a routine that implements an expedited order selection algorithm. The goal of the expedited order selection algorithm is to minimize the number of orders sent to each destination so that shipping costs are reduced. A destination may be a specific shipping address plus a specific purchaser's billing details. Orders that are sent to the same destination are known as "sibling orders." The algorithm has two stages. In the first stage, the algorithm schedules for shipment the orders for destinations for which all the sibling orders are filled. An order is filled when all its items are currently in inventory (*i.e.*, available) and can be shipped. For each group of sibling orders, the algorithm combines those sibling orders into a single combined order so that only one order is currently scheduled for shipment to each destination. In the second stage, the algorithm combines and schedules groups of sibling orders for which some of the sibling orders are not filled or partially filled. The algorithm may split each partially filled sibling order into a filled sibling order and a completely unfilled sibling order. The algorithm then combines all the filled sibling orders into a single combined order and schedules the combined order for shipment. If any group has only one sibling order and that order is partially filled, then the algorithm in one embodiment does not split that order to avoid making an extra shipment to that destination.

During the second stage, the algorithm may select and schedule groups of sibling orders in a sequence that is based on the next fulfillment time for an item in the group. The next fulfillment time for a group of sibling orders is the minimum expected fulfillment time of the items in that group of sibling orders. For example, if a group of sibling orders has seven items that are not yet fulfilled and their expected fulfillment times range from 3 days to 14 days, then the next fulfillment time for that group is 3 days. The algorithm first schedules those groups of sibling orders with the largest next fulfillment time. For example, if 6 groups have next fulfillment times of 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, and 14 days, respectively, then the algorithm first selects and schedules the sibling orders in the group with the next fulfillment time of 14 days, followed by the group with

the next fulfillment time of 11 days, and so on. By delaying the scheduling of groups with short next fulfillment times, the algorithm increases the chances of additional items becoming available (because of the shortness of the next fulfillment time) and thus combined with the scheduled order.

5 Steps 701-703 represent the first stage of the expedited order selection algorithm, and steps 704-706 represent the second stage of the expedited selection order algorithm. In steps 701-703, the algorithm loops selecting groups in which all sibling orders are filled and combining the orders. In step 701, the algorithm selects the next group with all sibling orders that are
10 filled. In step 703, if all such groups have already been selected, then the algorithm continues with the second stage in step 704, else the algorithm continues at step 703. In step 703, the algorithm combines and schedules the orders in the selected group and loops to step 701. In step 704, the algorithm selects the next group of sibling orders that has the largest next fulfillment time.
15 In step 705, if all such groups have already been selected, then the algorithm is done, else the algorithm continues at step 706. In step 706, the algorithm combines and schedules the orders in the selected group and loops to step 704. When the expedited order selection algorithm is being performed, new orders and new inventory may be received. Whenever such new orders and new inventory
20 is received, then the algorithm restarts to schedule and combine the new orders as appropriate.

Although the algorithm has been described as having two stages, it could be implemented in an incremental fashion where the assessment of the first and second stages are redone after each order is scheduled. One skilled in the art
25 would recognize that there are other possible combinations of these stages which still express the same essential algorithm.

Figures 8A-8C illustrate a hierarchical data entry mechanism in one embodiment. When collecting information from a user, a Web page typically consists of a long series of data entry fields that may not all fit onto the display at
30 the same time. Thus, a user needs to scroll through the Web page to enter the

information. When the data entry fields do not fit onto the display at the same time, it is difficult for the user to get an overall understanding of the type and organization of the data to be entered. The hierarchical data entry mechanism allows a user to understand the overall organization of the data to be entered even though the all data entry fields would not fit onto the display at the same time. Figure 8A illustrates an outline format of a sample form to be filled in. The sample form contains various sections identified by letters A, B, C, and D. When the user selects the start button, then section A expands to include the data entry fields for the customer name and address. Figure 8B illustrates the expansion of section A. Since only section A has been expanded, the user can view the data entry fields of section A and summary information of the other sections at the same time. The user then enters data in the various data entry fields that are displayed. Upon completion, the user selects either the next or previous buttons. The next button causes section A to be collapsed and section B to be expanded so that financial information may be entered. Figure 8C illustrates the expansion of section B. If the previous button is selected, then section A would collapse and be displayed as shown in Figure 8A. This collapsing and expanding is repeated for each section. At any time during the data entry, if an error is detected, then a Web page is generated with the error message in close proximity (*e.g.*, on the line below) to the data entry field that contains the error. This Web page is then displayed by the client system to inform the user of the error. In addition, each of the data "entry" fields may not be editable until the user clicks on the data entry field or selects an edit button associated with the data entry field. In this way, the user is prevented from inadvertently changing the contents of an edit field. When the user clicks on a data entry field, a new Web page is presented to the user that allows for the editing of the data associated with the field. When editing is complete, the edited data is displayed in the data "entry" field. Because the fields of the form are thus not directly editable, neither "named-submit" buttons nor Java are needed. Also, the form is more compact because the various data entry

options (*e.g.*, radio button) are displayed only on the new Web page when the field is to be edited.

Although the present invention has been described in terms of various embodiments, it is not intended that the invention be limited to these
5 embodiments. Modification within the spirit of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art. For example, the server system can map a client identifier to multiple customers who have recently used the client system. The server system can then allow the user to identify themselves by selecting one of the mappings based preferably on a display of partial purchaser-specific order
10 information. Also, various different single actions can be used to effect the placement of an order. For example, a voice command may be spoken by the purchaser, a key may be depressed by the purchaser, a button on a television remote control device may be depressed by the purchaser, or selection using any pointing device may be effected by the purchaser. Although a single action may
15 be preceded by multiple physical movements of the purchaser (*e.g.*, moving a mouse so that a mouse pointer is over a button), the single action generally refers to a single event received by a client system that indicates to place the order. Finally, the purchaser can be alternately identified by a unique customer identifier that is provided by the customer when the customer initiates access to
20 the server system and sent to the server system with each message. This customer identifier could be also stored persistently on the client system so that the purchaser does not need to re-enter their customer identifier each time access is initiated. The scope of the present invention is defined by the claims that follow.

CLAIMS

- 1 1. A method for placing an order to purchase an item, the order
2 being placed by a purchaser at a client system and received by a server system,
3 the method comprising:
4 under control of the server system,
5 receiving purchaser information including identification of
6 the purchaser, payment information, and shipment information from the client
7 system;
8 assigning a client identifier to the client system;
9 associating the assigned client identifier with the received
10 purchaser information;
11 sending to the client system the assigned client identifier;
12 and
13 sending to the client system display information identifying
14 the item and including an order button;
15 under control of the client system,
16 receiving and storing the assigned client identifier;
17 receiving and displaying the display information; and
18 in response to the selection of the order button, sending to
19 the server system a request to purchase the identified item, the request including
20 the assigned identifier; and
21 under control of the server system,
22 receiving the request; and
23 combining the purchaser information associated with the
24 client identifier included with the request to generate an order to purchase the
25 item in accordance with the billing and shipment information
26 whereby the purchaser effects the ordering of the product by
27 selection of the order button.

1 2. The method of claim 1 wherein the purchaser information is
2 received when the purchaser placed a previous order.

1 3. A method for ordering an item using a client system, the
2 method comprising:
3 providing an identifier that identifies a customer;
4 displaying information identifying the item and displaying an
5 indication of an action that is to be performed to order the identified item; and
6 in response to the indicated action being performed, sending to a
7 server system the provided identifier and a request to order the identified item
8 whereby the server system uses the sent identifier to identify
9 additional information needed to generate an order for the item.

1 4. The method of claim 3 wherein the identifier identifies the
2 client system and the server system provides the identifier to the client system.

1 5. The method of claim 3 wherein the client system and server
2 system communicate via the Internet.

1 6. The method of claim 3 wherein the identifier is provided by
2 the server system.

1 7. The method of claim 3 wherein the displaying includes
2 displaying an HTML document provided by the server system.

1 8. The method of claim 3 including sending from the client
2 system to the server system a confirmation that the order was generated.

1 9. The method of claim 3 wherein the action is a single action.

1 10. The method of claim 9 wherein the single action is clicking
2 a mouse button when a cursor is positioned over a predefined area of the
3 displayed information.

1 11. The method of claim 9 wherein the single action is a sound
2 generated by a user.

1 12. The method of claim 9 wherein the single action is selection
2 using a television remote control.

1 13. The method of claim 9 wherein the single action is
2 depressing of a key on a key pad.

1 14. The method of claim 9 wherein the single action is selecting
2 using a pointing device.

1 15. The method of claim 9 wherein the single action is selection
2 of a displayed indication.

1 16. The method of claim 3 wherein the displaying includes
2 displaying partial information supplied by the server system as to the identity of
3 the user.

1 17. The method of claim 3 wherein the displaying includes
2 displaying partial shipping information supplied by the server system.

1 18. The method of claim 3 wherein the displaying includes
2 displaying partial payment information supplied by the server system.

1 19. The method of claim 3 wherein the indicated action is
2 selecting a button and that button indicates to enable single-action ordering when
3 currently not enabled.

1 20. The method of claim 3 when the displaying includes
2 displaying a moniker identifying a shipping address for the customer.

1 21. A method in a server system for generating an order for an
2 item, the method comprising:
3 receiving user information for users of a plurality of client systems;
4 for each client system,
5 storing the received user information in association with an
6 identifier; and
7 providing the identifier to the client system;
8 when requested by a client system, providing information
9 describing the item to the requesting client system;
10 receiving a request from a client system to order the item, the
11 request indicating the identifier and an indication of the item; and
12 combining the user information stored in association with the
13 indicated identifier to effect the ordering of the item for the user of the client
14 system identified by the indicated identifier.

1 22. The method of claim 21 including providing partial user
2 information to the client system so that the user can verify whether the identifier
3 is associated with correct user information.

1 23. The method of claim 21 wherein the server system
2 associates user information for a plurality of users with one identifier and
3 wherein a user designates which associated user information to use.

1 24. The method of claim 21 wherein the user information is
2 received when orders are placed.

1 25. The method of claim 21 wherein multiple orders are
2 combined into a single order.

1 26. The method of claim 21 wherein multiple orders are
2 combined into separate orders based on expected shipment date.

1 27. The method of claim 21 wherein the identifier uniquely
2 identifies the user.

1 28. The method of claim 21 wherein the identifier uniquely
2 identifies a client system.

1 29. The method of claim 28 wherein the identifier is associated
2 with different users at different times.

1 30. The method of claim 28 wherein the identifier is associated
2 with multiple users at the same time.

1 31. The method of claim 28 wherein multiple identifiers are
2 associated with one user at the same time.

1 32. A method in a computer system for scheduling orders for a
2 plurality of destinations, the orders to be shipped to the same destination being
3 sibling orders, the method comprising:

4 scheduling the sibling orders for each destination for which all the
5 sibling orders are filled so that multiple filled sibling orders can be shipped
6 together; and

7 after scheduling such sibling orders, scheduling sibling orders for
8 each destination for which at least one of the sibling orders has an available item.

1 33. The method of claim 32 wherein the scheduling of sibling
2 orders for which at least one of the sibling orders has an available item includes
3 scheduling those sibling orders with the largest next fulfillment time first.

1 34. The method of claim 32 wherein when a new order is
2 received, the steps of the method are restarted.

1 35. The method of claim 32 wherein when inventory is received,
2 the steps of the method are restarted.

1 36. A method of placing an order for an item comprising:
2 under control of the client system,
3 displaying information identifying the item; and
4 in response to a predefined action being performed, sending
5 a request to order the item along with an identifier of a purchaser of the item to a
6 server system; and
7 under control of the server system,
8 receiving the request;
9 retrieving additional information previously stored for the
10 purchaser identified by the identifier in the received request; and

11 generating an order for the purchaser identified by identifier
12 in the received request.

1 37. The method of claim 36 wherein the displaying of
2 information includes displaying information indicating the predefined action.

1 38. The method of claim 36 wherein the predefined action is
2 clicking a button.

1 39. The method of claim 36 wherein the predefined action is
2 speaking of a sound.

1 40. The method of claim 36 wherein the predefined action is a
2 single action.

1 41. The method of claim 36 wherein a user of the client system
2 does not need to explicitly identify themselves when placing an order.

1 42. A client system for ordering an item comprising:
2 an identifier that identifies a customer;
3 a display component for displaying information identifying the
4 item; and
5 an item ordering component that in response to performance of a
6 predefined action, sends a request to a server system to order the identified item,
7 the request including the identifier so that the server system can locate additional
8 information needed to complete the order.

1 43. The client system of claim 42 wherein the display
2 component is a browser.

1 44. The client system of claim 42 wherein the predefined action
2 is the clicking of a mouse button.

1 45. A server system for generating an order comprising:
2 a data storage medium storing information for a plurality of users;
3 a receiving component for receiving requests to order an item, the
4 request including an indication of one of the plurality of users; and
5 an order placement component that retrieves from the data storage
6 medium information for the indicated user and that uses the retrieved information
7 to place an order for the indicated customer for the item.

1 46. The server system of claim 45 wherein the request is sent by
2 a client system in response to a single action being performed.

1 47. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for
2 causing a computer system to perform the method of claim 3.

1 48. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for
2 causing a computer system to perform the method of claim 21.

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PLACING A PURCHASE
ORDER VIA A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method and system for placing an order to purchase an item via the Internet. The order is placed by a purchaser at a client system and received by a server system. The server system receives purchaser information including identification of the purchaser, payment information, and shipment information from the client system. The server system then assigns a client identifier to the client system and associates the assigned client identifier with the received purchaser information. The server system sends to the client system the assigned client identifier and an HTML document identifying the item and including an order button. The client system receives and stores the assigned client identifier and receives and displays the HTML document. In response to the selection of the order button, the client system sends to the server system a request to purchase the identified item. The server system receives the request and combines the purchaser information associated with the client identifier of the client system to generate an order to purchase the item in accordance with the billing and shipment information whereby the purchaser effects the ordering of the product by selection of the order button.

101

Summary Description of Item

102

Add it to your shopping cart

(You can always cancel later...)

NEW! Order faster with 1-Click!
(You can cancel within 90 minutes)

103

Buy item and ship it to:

John Doe at home

103c Check shipping address or change 1-Click settings

103d Learn more about 1-Click Express ordering

104

Detail Description of Item

Fig 1B

Thank you for your 1-Click order!

105 { A quantity of 1 of [the item] will be shipped to you as soon as possible. We will do our best to minimize your shipping costs by combining your 1-click orders into as few shipments as possible.

Please continue browsing,
Review or Change your 1-Click orders

101 { Summary Description of Item

Fig 1C

Summary of 1-Click Express Orders

Press this button if you changed Quantities of any item below. If you don't press it, your changes won't "stick." You can set the quantity to 0 (zero) to cancel an item.

The 1-Click orders below (available in 3 or fewer days) will be shipped together:

Order# 098337

1	Item 1	\$10.00
---	--------	---------

1	Item 2	\$15.00
---	--------	---------

Total		\$25.00
-------	--	---------

The 1-Click orders below (available in one week or more) will be shipped together:

Order# 09336

1	Item 3	\$20.00
---	--------	---------

1	Item 4	6.00
---	--------	------

Total		\$26.00
-------	--	---------

Ship to: John Doe at home

Shipment Method: Standard Domestic Shipping

Payment Method: ****-****-***1-2345

Continue shopping
1-Click Express shipping policies

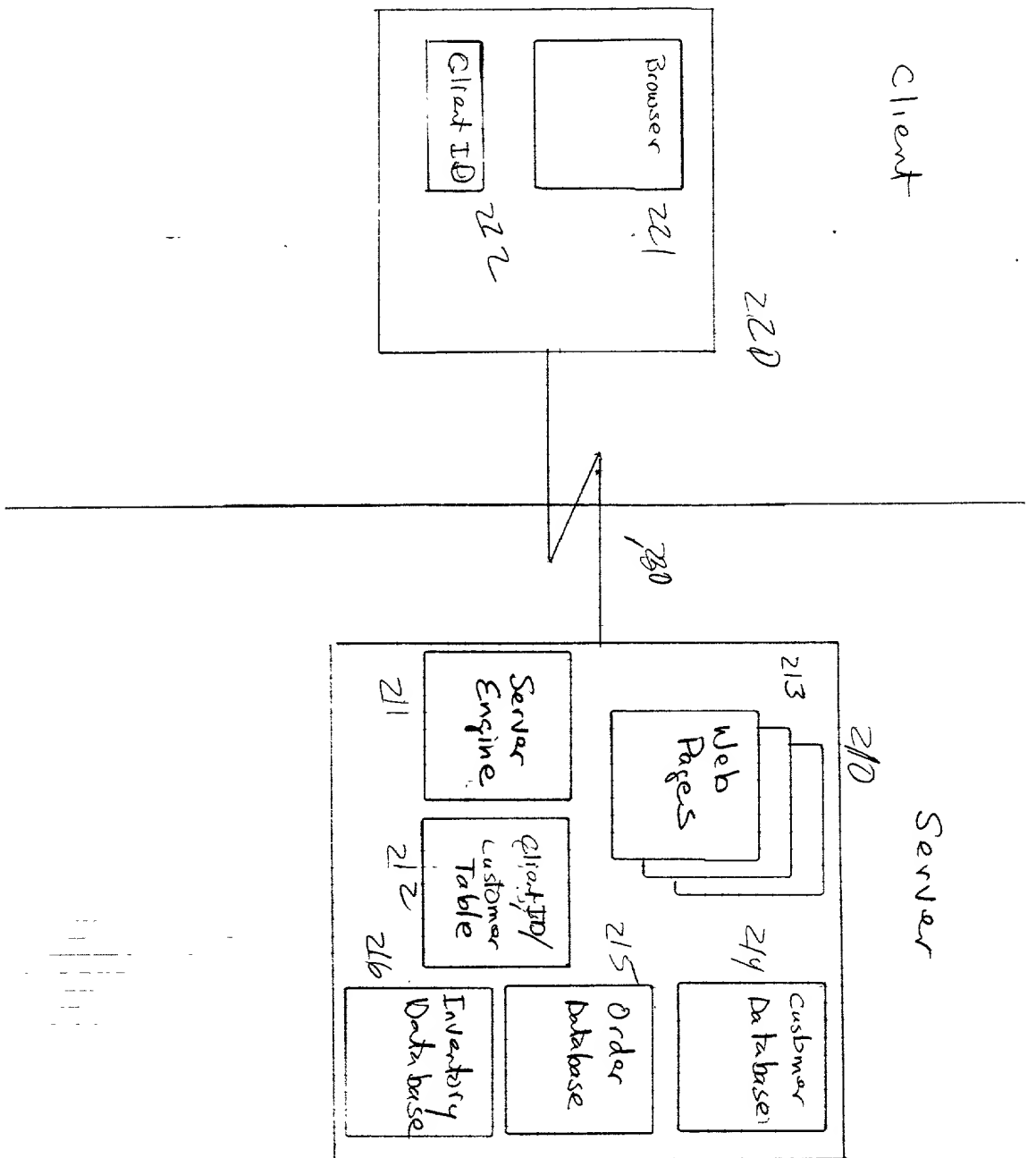


Figure 2

Enable
Single-Action
Ordering

301

retrieve
Client ID

302

Set Client ID/
Customer
Mapping

303

Set Single-Action
Ordering for Client ID/
Customer

304

Return
Confirming
Web page

Done

Figure 3

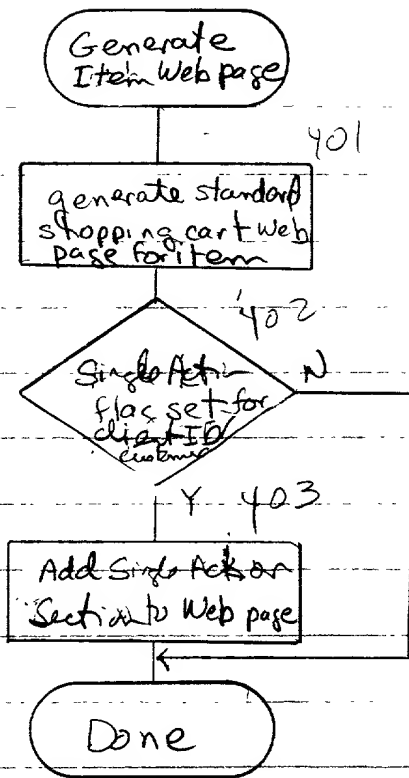


Fig. 1

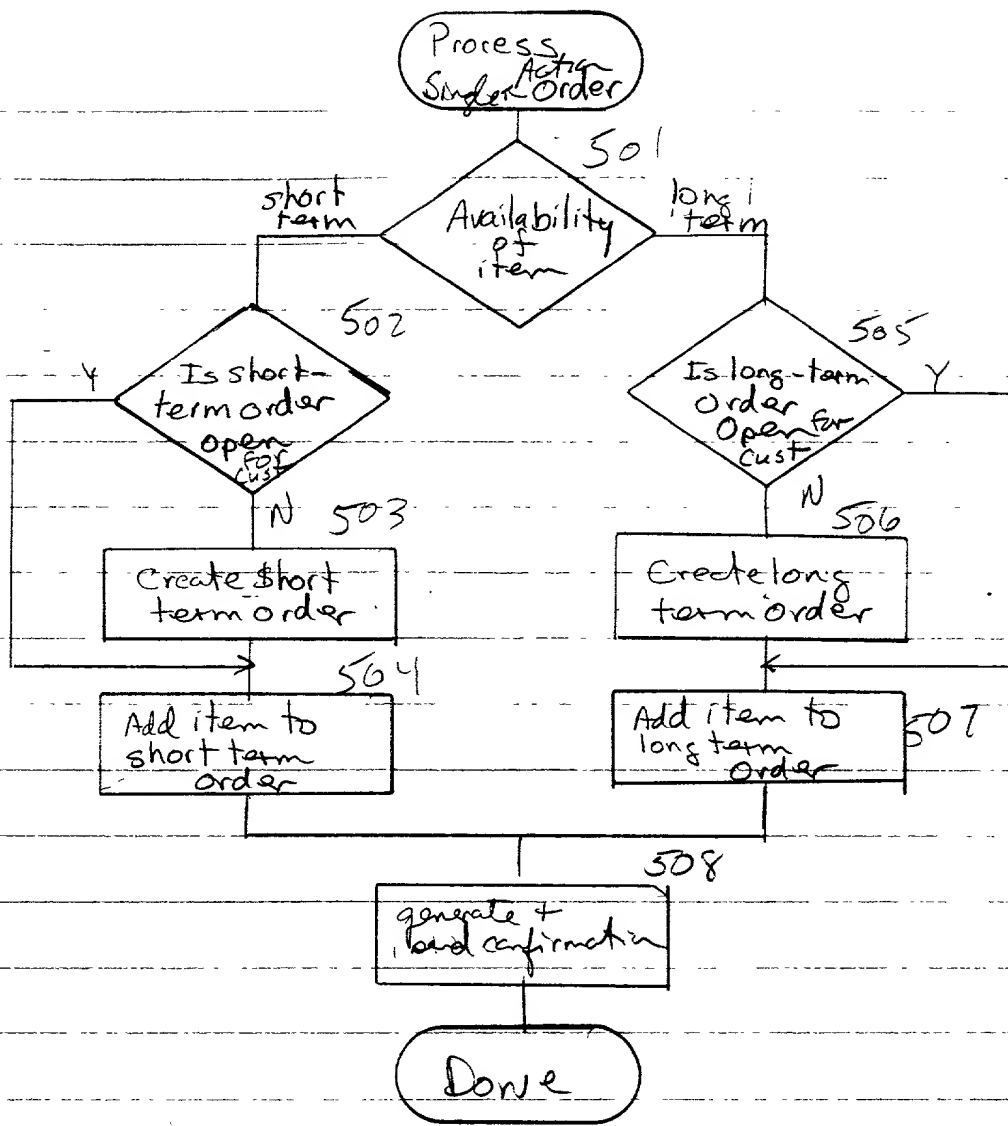


Fig 5

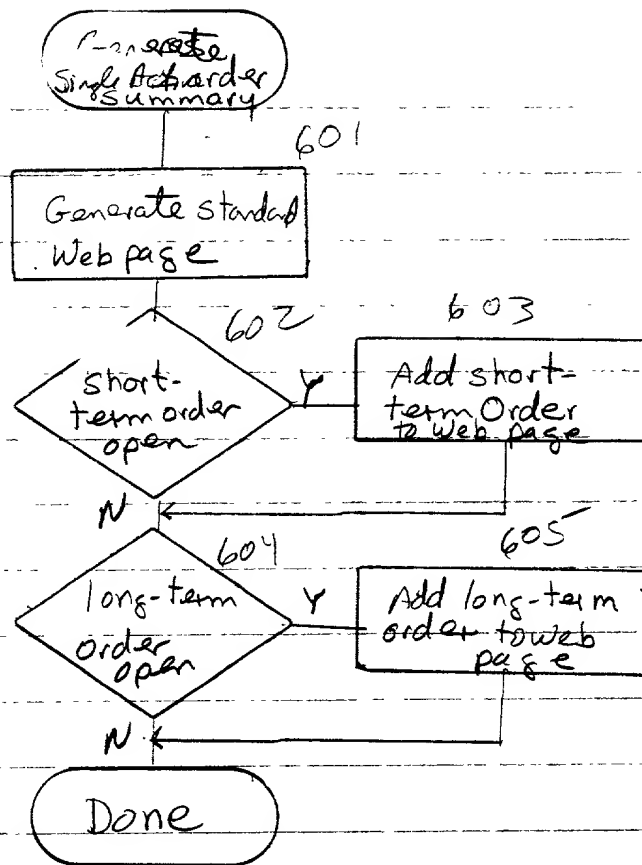


Fig 6

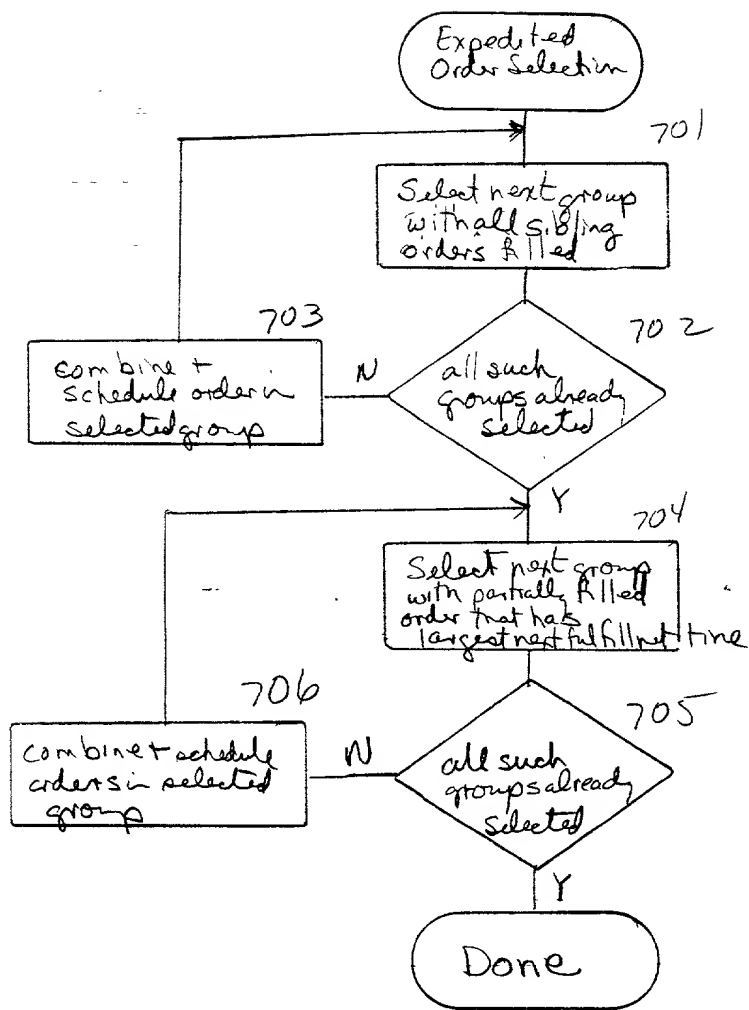


Fig 7

START

A: Customer Name & Address

B: Customer Financial Info

C: Customer Employment Info

D: Customer Education Info

⋮

FIG 8A

Sec 504 (b) (5) (A) (i)

A: First Name:

M.I. :

Last Name:

Street :

City :

State :

zip :

B: Customer Financial Info

C: Customer Employment Info

D: Customer Education Info

:

Fig 8 B

A: Customer Name & Address

B: Net Worth;

Annual Income:

Spouse's Annual Income:

Other Income:

C: Customer Employment Info

D: Customer Education Info

⋮

Fig 8C

JUN 02 1998

1

DECLARATION

As the below-named inventors, we declare that:

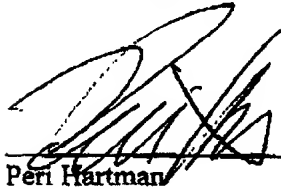
Our residences, post office addresses, and citizenships are as stated below under our names.

We believe we are the original, first, and joint inventors of the invention entitled "METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PLACING A PURCHASE ORDER VIA A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK," which is described and claimed in the specification and claims of Patent Application No. 08/928,951, which we filed in the United States Patent and Trademark Office on September 12, 1997 and for which a patent is sought.

We have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment specifically referred to herein (if any).

We acknowledge our duty to disclose information of which we are aware which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with 37 C.F.R. § 1.56(a).

We further declare that all statements made herein of our own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further, that these statements were made with the knowledge that the making of willfully false statements and the like is punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and may jeopardize the validity of any patent issuing from this patent application.



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